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Qualitative case study research in Africa and Asia: challenges and prospects

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Abstract

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Keywords

Qualitative, Case, Study, Research, Africa, Asia, Challenges, Prospects

Disciplines

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Qualitative Case Study Research in Africa and Asia: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Much of the literature on research design has focussed on research conducted in developed, uni-cultural or primarily English speaking countries. Studies of qualitative case study research, the challenges and prospects, have been embedded in Western/Euro-centric society and social theories. Although there have been some theoretical studies, few empirical studies have been conducted to explore the nature of the challenges of qualitative case study in Africa and Asia. These challenges include cultural and language issues affecting access to companies and respondent issues and data analysis and financial issues. The authors while conducting qualitative case study research in Libya and Malaysia faced these issues. The discussion in this paper examines these three issues in order to make a contribution toward the literature in this area.

Key words: Libya, Malaysia, qualitative case study research, challenges & prospects.

1. INTRODUCTION

Libya has recently funded many Masters and PhD students to undertake overseas study in order to improve the performance of staff in their universities. It is believed that this will assist the universities to fill more responsible positions in the future, and to satisfy the needs the individual researcher

(Bakar, 1998). The qualitative approach to research was virtually unknown in Libya until the beginning of the 1990s when Libya began funding students to study overseas, (mainly in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (USA)). These Libyan students have undertaken many research projects and most (if not all) have focused on a research paradigm using quantitative rather than qualitative methods. This is because quantitative research methods are more common than qualitative research methods in accounting education as taught in universities in the USA (Kilani, 1988) as well as in many other disciplines.

Similarly, in Malaysia, most PhD research in the business and management fields is based on a quantitative approach (Bidin, 2003; Sharif, 2003). Also similar to Libya, the majority of Malaysian postgraduate students have received their doctoral education in multiple disciplines from the UK and the USA. Therefore, qualitative case study research in both countries has received less emphasis than the more popular quantitative survey based research. Two of the authors are currently working on their PhD research in accounting and industrial relations at the University of Wollongong in Australia. Both have been exposed to qualitative research methodologies during their candidature and found them useful for collecting the type of data needed for the broad questions in their research.

Using qualitative research methods in areas where traditionally quantitative methods have been used must be undertaken with regard to the challenges and the problems faced by researchers at all stages of the research. The necessity of identifying challenges and finding solutions for these problems came about because of the increasing use of qualitative research in business research in different countries. For example, qualitative research involves different knowledge and skills. The authors were required to improve existing capabilities and expand their knowledge in order to carry out qualitative case study based research. Researchers using qualitative research designs need to ensure that they are successful: by, ensuring the suitability of the research design to the project outcomes, and gaining qualitative research skills. The aim of this paper is to discuss the key challenges and expectations of a qualitative case study based research technique in two developing countries, Libya and Malaysia, and to discuss challenges including social, cultural and language issues.

2. THE LOCATION OF THE STUDY

Libya occupies a strategic geopolitical location in North Africa as it links Eastern with Western Africa and Southern Europe with the rest of Africa. Libya occupies 1,759,540 square kilometres, being smaller than Algeria but almost twice the area of Egypt, five times the size of France, and one-third the size of the United States (*Jamahiriyah : era of the masses*, ; Knapp, 1977, p. 174; Monti-Belkaoui & Riahi-Belkaoui, 1996). Libya has a population of almost five and a half million (Saleh, 2001; unit, 2003). The Islamic religion and Arabic language are two central characteristics of Libyan culture.

Malaysia is a federation of 13 States. These States are located in the Malaysian Peninsular and East Malaysia. Malaysia's population of 25.3 million continues to develop at a rate of 2.4 percent per annum (Economic Planning Unit, Malaysia 2004). Malaysia's population includes many ethnic groups, with the Malays comprising the majority and holding its political sway. By constitutional decree, Malaysia is a Muslim state. About one quarter of the population are Chinese and historically have played a vital role in trade and commerce. Malaysians of Indian ethnicity comprise about seven percent of the population and include Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians. About 85 per cent of the Indian community is Tamil. Non-Malay indigenous groups make up more than half of the State of Sarawak's population and about 66 per cent of the State of Sabah's population. They are divided into dozens of ethnic groups, but there are commonalities in culture and lifestyle. Although Bahasa Malaysia is the national language, English is widely used in commerce and industry and may be considered a second language. Other spoken languages include various Chinese dialects and Tamil. Population distribution is unequal, with some 15 million residents being concentrated in the lowlands of Peninsular Malaysia.

3. JUSTIFICATION FOR SELECTING A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Understanding the *reality* of the research topic from the participants' perspective may be better achieved by collecting data through case study methods (Yin, 2003). Therefore, qualitative methods are more appropriate to achieve the objectives of our study where the research goal is to understand and explain rather than to quantify. Data gained from qualitative research methods may suggest a theory to explain the phenomena being studied which may then be strengthened by quantitative support (Eisenhardt, 1989). The quantitative analysis in social science gives an overview of qualitative method. The qualitative case study method, which was adopted in each of our research designs, is seen as more suitable than other research methods (e.g. large surveys, questionnaires, etc.) to understand the subtleties and gain a more complete view of the subject being studied in the research setting. The case study approach is also appropriate for describing, analysing and understanding formal and informal processes in organizations. Gummerson (1991) argued that by employing the case study method, the opportunity for a holistic view of a process would be an important advantage. The holistic or complete view will normally be seen in the comprehensive details through the observation and interviews required in the case study method. This observation allows study of various distinctive features, observation of them in relation to each other, and analysis of the findings within the entire environment. Within the case study approach, multiple techniques for data collection are used. These include: interview, direct observation and document analysis. Multiple techniques in the case study approach are useful for triangulation purposes, which in turn produce a more robust study (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). Next section the authors will discuss the key challenges and expectations from the qualitative case study.

4. KEY CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS FROM THE QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Before to discuss the key challenges and expectations from the case study, here the researchers provide a brief summary of their research project conducted in Libya and Malaysia. In Libyan context, the researcher examines the present and potential role of accounting information systems in the development needs of developing countries, and in particular Libya. Most research in this area has focused on the suitability of accounting systems with little attention paid to addressing how these systems can be made more useful in decision-making, planning and control. In this study, the role of accounting systems in development needs and the effect of legal, economic and social conditions are investigated. To this purpose, Libya is used as a case study. In the Malaysian context, the researcher studied employee participation in the private sector, which focused on four companies. Previous researchers have not explained the different forms of employee participation (EP) that implemented in union and non-union private firms. These researchers also do not elucidate the reasons why the company developed different forms of employee participation in the firm. This is the main motivation of researcher drives him to study EP from the industrial relations perspectives.

4.1. Accessibility to the organizations - social, cultural and lingual issues

4.1.1 The Libyan experience

There is often difficulty for researchers in gaining entry to and acceptance in the organisation the subject of their research (Baird, 2004). This is especially true where a case study research design is used because the organisation will be under fairly intense scrutiny over a period of time. The challenges that were faced when the researchers tried to gain access to organisations to conduct qualitative research were consistent with Baird's findings.

The initial thought of conducting a field study in Libya, as one developing country, started when the researcher contacted the cultural attaché in the Libyan Bureau (embassy) in Canberra. This was in an attempt to overcome the first obstacle, which was to obtain funding and final approval from the scholarship officer in the Libyan Bureau in Canberra to undertake the phase of data collection in Libya. This data collection phase, however, involved waiting six months for the final approval. During this period, the researcher made contact with the General Company for Pipelines and the Industry Secretariat. These organisations became the two research sites for the Libyan case study. Each was contacted to gain the necessary information and permission to conduct interviews and examine relevant documents in each organisation. Approval to conduct the study was easily acquired in English from the General Company for Pipelines, whereas getting the confirmation from the Industry Secretariat proved more problematic. The problem was the need for acquiring this confirmation in English. This problem related to social, cultural and lingual issues. Some of those in charge of this organisation insisted on providing the researcher with the confirmation that was written in Arabic. This was due to a law which prohibits all authorities from writing to any other authority in a language other than the Arabic language.

The Research Office in the University of Wollongong (being unaware of this issue), requested the documentation be in English before providing final approval to undertake data collection. The researcher was able through social connections with people in the company to get a copy in English from one company; however the other company letter was in Arabic. The researcher explained that this was a legal issue to the research office and proposed submitting confirmations, one written in English and the other in Arabic. The Arabic letter would have an English translation attached. The Research Office agreed and subsequently the initial phase was accomplished. Final approval to travel to Libya was given and travel was undertaken on 8 July 2004.

Initially, the Libyan researcher travelled to Tripoli to meet those in charge in the Public Board for Economic Units Ownership, the National Board for Documentation and Information, the Planning Secretariat and the Central Bank of Libya. The researcher's task was facilitated in the Central Bank of Libya due to the presence of a person with close social ties to the researcher. With the rest of the authorities, however, the researcher's task was more difficult.

The culture in Libyan business is that a monotonously long routine of confirmations had to be sought. These required reference to many authorities, often more than once. These authorities requested that the researcher submit a letter of authorization to conduct the research stating the purpose of the mission and what authority it was related to. Owing to the numerous authorities involved, the researcher set up a general letter addressed "to whom it may concern". Unfortunately there was an administrative regulation which prohibits public authorities accepting any letter unless it is addressed to them directly. Subsequently all correspondences addressed "to whom it may concern" were regarded as illegal and unacceptable to identify the researcher, the purpose of the research and the authority it is related to. The researcher tried to explain his circumstances to those in charge of these authorities. He explained that he could not obtain several letters, each addressed to a different authority with whom he intends to make contact. Following strenuous effort and many discussions and entreaties, the researcher was authorised to acquire the data and information necessary for his research. This process took two weeks.

The researcher first contacted the National Board for Documentation and Information, but could not explore all matters, owing to the archive's bad state. The failure of computers as well as the fact that there was no photocopier in the archive also made the data collection process difficult. No material was allowed to be taken outside the archive to be photocopied, which made the process of examining the archive's documents in the archive itself an almost impossible task.

When the researcher contacted the General Company for Pipelines, the first problem was to pass through the entry-gate and obtain permission to park his car inside the car park allocated for visitors. This problem lasted three days with consultations with the Security and Integrity Unit. A visitor card was eventually issued which was valid for three months. The card included the allocation of a place

in the car park for parking the researcher's car. The researcher then commenced his task. However, in the second week the group in charge of security and integrity was changed and the question of entry and parking the car was reviewed. Eventually the matter was peacefully sorted out and resulted in nothing more than the change of parking space from one number to another, without any logical reason for this change.

As the researcher's task continued smoothly, he tried to build up relationships with some of the employees the Industry Secretariat in order to facilitate his task. Indeed, one of the engineers had made contact with the Industry Secretariat to introduce the researcher and obtain a promise from those in charge there to meet him and facilitate his task. Once this was done the researcher went to the Industry Secretariat to meet some of those in charge. The researcher's task went relatively smoothly, though some of the interviews were cut short because some of those who had been interviewed were unable to continue the interviews on the pretext of having other work to be undertaken.

4.1.2 the Malaysian experience

Most Malaysian private firms are very suspicious of allowing anyone to conduct research in their organisations. There is no easy way to gain access to Malaysian firms (Bhopal & Todd, 2000). As stated by the Human Resources (HR) Manager of Steelco¹, strangers or researchers were allowed to enter premises "as long as your presence here is on a professional and academic basis, all claims and findings should be factual or at least analyse fairly....In order to make this research a success, the primary objective must be made beneficial for both management and employeesIn addition, good company practices in other companies where you are conducting research must be shared with us to assist us learn and improve our operation" (A letter of approval from HR Manager, 10th August 2003).

In October 2002, the researcher travelled to Malaysia to make initial contact with manufacturing and service firms to conduct research on employee participation. The researcher sent an application letter (with his supervisor's recommendation letter) to more than 200 private firms in Malaysia. The responses from these companies were very low. Initially only three companies responded² positively. Eight responded with a refusal and the others did not reply. While the researcher was in Malaysia from November 2002 to February 2003, he also followed up with personal contact in those firms who initially had rejected the application. The responses from them were not very promising. In the end, the researcher's academic supervisor requested him to find another company from the manufacturing sector.

After much initial disappointment and frustration based on the low response rates from Malaysian organisations, the researcher contacted one of his relatives who was working as senior charge man with over 15 years experience in one of the steel companies in Klang, West Malaysia. The researcher's relative then introduced him to the HR Manager of this company. Finally, the researcher was able to convince the HR Manager about his research and its contributions to the company. In the end only four firms were interested in participating in this research project. These are two companies belonging to the manufacturing sector, and the other two companies are from the service industry. Both sectors represent union and non-union firms.

The researcher also received an acceptance letter from one company in the Malay language, in a similar situation to that faced by the Libyan researcher. Again the Human Ethics Committee requested a translation of this letter in English. In the end, the researcher contacted the HR Manager of that company to get the acceptance letter in an English version. Finally, the Human Ethics Committee granted the final approval for data collection in Malaysia in August 2003.

¹ Steelco was one of the companies to which access was gained in Malaysia

² Two from the service industry and another one from manufacturing.

The problems and challenges of access to companies in both situations (Libya and Malaysia) were quite similar. Despite this cultural issue the researchers' were able to overcome these problems.

4.2. Conducting interviews in Developing Countries

The interview is a powerful method of data collection, because it provides an opportunity to ask for clarification if an answer to a questionnaire question is vague (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Interviewing was a main tool for both researchers to gather data from employees within the organisations. Using a tape-recorder allowed the researcher to concentrate fully on the respective interviewees answers and thoroughly observe their non-verbal behaviour.

4.2.1 *The Libyan case*

Among the problems encountered by the researcher in Libya was the refusal of all participants to the allow use of the tape-recorder during the interviews. The exception was the Popular Committee Secretary for the General Company for Pipelines. On many occasions this refusal was due to the sensitivity of the situation and cultural issues. The researcher in many cases was faced with the mistrust of the person who was interviewed. In some cases the person thought that the researcher might operate the tape-recorder inside his bag without the participant's permission. This happened with the Head of Mechanism and Information Bureau in the Industry Secretariat where she literally said: "I fear that you have the tape-recorder which you've just put in your bag in operation now" (Interview with the Head of Mechanism and Information Bureau, 10 August 2004). She was assured that recording could not happen without her personal approval. However, despite all the assurances, she felt very distrustful and therefore her answers to questions were short, incomplete and unclear. This is similar to the point raised by King (1994) about the importance of trust in interviews where tape recording is used.

Regarding the interviews, the Libyan researcher conducted a total of thirteen interviews in the General Company for Pipelines. These were with: the Financial Supervisor, the Internal Auditor, the General Director of the Financial and Commercial Department, the Director of Finance, the Production Manager, the Director of Bureau of Planning and Supervision, the Commercial Director, the Head of General Accounting and Budget Unit, the Head of Costs Unit, the Head of the Financial Follow-up Unit, the Director of Legal Affairs Office, the Head of Purchasing Unit and the Head of Stock Control.

At the start of each interview, the researcher began by ensuring that the person to be interviewed was acquainted with the information sheet in accordance with University of Wollongong Human Research Policies. This same procedure was also suggested by Stake (1995). The researcher then asked the interviewee if they would mind him using a tape-recorder to record the interview, or would they rather have the details of the interview written down in note form. Of the overall number of interviews that have been conducted, only one person agreed to the use of tape-recording while the rest refused. Some expressed the view that they would be more relaxed without the use of tape-recording, and that they could provide more realistic answers to the questions with the recorder turned off. This encouraged the researcher to set aside the choice of using tape-recording in the interest of the main objective of acquiring information being met (Jones & Gratton, 2003).

All participants in Libya, except one, were males, and the duration of the interviews varied with the participants. For example, the interview with the Director of Finance lasted five hours and ten minutes while the interview with the Internal Auditor lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. The rest of the interviews with the other participants lasted an average of an hour and a half. The interviews were conducted during July and August 2004, and on some occasions the interviews with some of these people were undertaken over two day period. In the case of the Production Manager this was due to the fact that the interviewee was occupied with regular meetings in the department, and therefore frequently not available.

At the start of each interview, the researcher asked the participant a simple and conventional question. This was to describe the nature of job undertaken and its significance to the company. This is a format used by King (1994), and Jones and Gratton (2003).

4.2.2. The Malaysian case

The discussion will now explain how interviews were used in the Malaysian companies in order to gather qualitative data for the case study. First, the interview guidelines had been written in English and Malay. This was undertaken in an attempt to avoid lingual issues. In four companies the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and most of the managers had a good command of spoken and written English. In the event that respondents did not speak English (particularly non-managerial employees and union representatives), the interview was conducted in Malay. Most of the people (all major ethnic groups) in Malaysia communicate in the Malay language because Malay is the national language in any formal official events. Therefore, the interview schedule was also translated into the Malay language. After translation, the researcher gave the interview schedule to an expert who worked for the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (the government agency responsible for publishing books in the Malay language). Her recommendations were incorporated in the final draft of interview schedule for non-managerial employees and union representatives. As a result, the final interview comprised both Malay and English versions for easy reference.

The experience of conducting the research by using tape recorder during the interview sessions was similar to the Libyan research project. In the Malaysian case, all respondents were willing to accept the recording of their interview except one person. In Steelco the researcher had difficulty in convincing the HR Manager to allow tape recording of the interview. Instead, he asked the researcher to record the interview by note taking. It took three days to complete the whole interview session with him. Other respondents agreed to record their interview.

As a key person (gatekeeper) in this company, the HR Manager allowed the researcher to spend time with his employees during working hours (about two hours each interview session). Interview sessions were held in different locations. Most interviews were recorded and the permission was obtained prior to the interview. Some interviews were conducted in a private room without any disturbance. This allowed these employees to speak freely without fear of being overheard. Some of the interviews were conducted in the respondents working place, particularly among non-managerial employees. On occasions, the researcher needed to interview employees inside or outside the factory where a lot of noise was happening. This resulted in poor recording of interview sessions, which were difficult to transcribe. Mostly the noise came from the machines on the factory floor.

Based on the discussion above, there are differences in terms of interview session with research participants. In Libya, majority respondents were refused to record their interview except one. On contrary, in Malaysia, the majority of respondents are willingly to agree to record their interviews except one participant. In Libya, the political sensitivity and privacy issues are becoming a stumbling block for respondents to give their permission to record their interviews. Whereas in Malaysia, the cultural and language became a major factors to help the researcher to record the interview. This is because the researcher has capability to speak multiple languages (Malay, English and Tamil) with different ethnics group respondents. He also was able to convince the respondents to understand the overall research project.

4.3. Accessing documents and observing official meetings

In both Libya and Malaysia most of the companies did not want the researchers to attend any formal meetings between managers and employees. For example in Libyan case the researcher has been

waiting more than one month to observe the important meeting between middle managers. Similarly in one of company in Malaysia, the researcher has to wait more than two months to observe the meeting between managers and production supervisors. However, after persistent negotiations by means of gatekeepers, both researchers were allowed to attend one or two meetings during our visits to these companies. As well as observation issues, problems of how to extract important documents for triangulation and validity purposes arose. Both researchers also face difficulties to review company documents such as annual reports, minutes of meeting, company magazine and so forth. Eventually these too were resolved through careful negotiation, and observance of social and cultural norms.

4.4. Language and cultural challenges in the local context

The language used to collect data was Arabic (Libya) and Malay and Tamil (Malaysia). This was because the respondents could not speak English. This influenced both researchers to use their own language to conduct interviews. However, this created complications when translating the entire transcripts from our own language to English before analysis could take place, and it involved many hours of extra work. Meeting these difficulties however ensured that the tangible meaning was not lost from our original interview texts. We felt that any loss of meaning from the interviews would affect the validity of the research. This was something, which we had been careful to avoid.

The use of respondents' own language also ensured that culturally they were able to relax and identify with the interviewer more. This was also an important point in gaining agreement to conduct the interviews as consent may not have been given so readily to an interviewer from another culture or country that may have been viewed as an outsider. In an ethnographic sense the interviewer will be classed as 'one of them' due to shared cultural experiences (Breuer, Muck, & Roth, 2002).

4.5. The expectation gap between the Human Research Ethics Committee, and international research students

In the researchers' experience there is a gap between the expectations of the Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Wollongong, and the students who come from different countries and multicultural backgrounds. This is also true for students wanting to conduct research in developing countries, as was the case in the research discussed so far. The Human Research Ethics Committee believes that all students should follow their guideline as specified here:

- Assume more responsibility for sensitive issues when they are conducting interviews with the participants.
- Improve the guidelines for interviews, which mean improving their responsibility about the sensitive issues.
- Understand that all participants in the research are voluntary and they are free to refuse to participate and withdraw from the research at any time.

Based on the above issues, the committee encourages and makes compulsory for all research students to show on information sheet to the research participants and asks them to sign the consent form prior to the interview session. Therefore, the use of a consent form among the research participants in Libya and Malaysia became an essential issue for researchers.

For Western societies, the consent form is an important mechanism in enforcing confidentiality. It is also one way of building trust with participants. On the other hand, for the Third World and developing

countries such as those in Africa or Asia a request to sign the consent form was a problem for research participants. Thus, some difficulties were experienced in adhering to the Human Research Ethics Protocols. The use of consent forms is particularly problematic in a country where the participants do not understand that this sort of instrument is used to protect their interests. For example in one company in Malaysia, a participant stated: "*Saya akan menyertai dalam kajian kamu secara sukarela sekiranya saya tidak tanda tangan dalam borang ini*" (I am voluntarily to participate in your research project if I do not sign this form). Similarly in Libya, one of the managerial interviewees said *انا سوف اشارك في هذا البحث اذا لم تجبرني على "التوقيع على هذا النموذج"* (I will participate in this research if you do not force me to sign this form). The issue of taping interviews, and the use of the consent forms was viewed by participants as a means to 'trap' them with their own words, or hold them accountable in an official way. Whilst some respondents in Western countries may also not wish to sign a consent form it is generally understood that the consent form is for their protection.

4.6. Challenges from the research funding and financial limitation

Funding plays a crucial role in completing any PhD research that involves the collection of primary data from a different country within a specific timeframe. With these projects great financial difficulties were faced in order to conduct the research in Libya and Malaysia. Funding was not received from the university at which we are currently studying nor from our sponsors. This meant that as well as the fees paid to the University as overseas PhD candidates, we also had to absorb the costs of travelling to and conducting research in a different country to the one in which we were currently residing.

Trying to conduct research without funding adds to the pressures inherent in a PhD candidature. As qualitative PhD researchers, we needed to spend money on travelling, food, hotel, and research equipment (laptop, computer, printer, memory stick, diskettes, A4 paper for printing cost, internet bill costs, telephone, postal etc). These costs were considerable due to spending more than three months in the field collecting enough data to ensure validity of the research. For example, the Malaysian fieldwork took about ten months, partly because of the challenges previously discussed relating to access and changing the questionnaire to Malay to suit lingual needs. Scientific researchers have access to equipments and grant funding to ensure that this research is of high quality. It is arguable that for sake of equity, qualitative researchers have access to equivalent finding.

5. Analysis and Discussion

As can be noted from the previous discussion there are several areas that using a qualitative case study research design in a developing country can create difficulties.

Libya and Malaysia are countries where the multicultural aspect of the society has a great impact on the people and organisations. Any person conducting research in these countries needs to be cognisant with this issue. Therefore, the multicultural aspect should be considered one challenge, which has an impact on the choice of research design and plan. The multicultural aspect of countries in Africa and Asia is different to the nature of multiculturalism in Australia. The most basic aspect is the extensive use of multiple languages.

In order to conduct the interviews, observation in meetings and the workplace, and also to conduct document analysis, the researcher must have a good working command of all languages involved. Whilst this may not be so important where a quantitative survey is used, it is imperative for case study research where the researcher is recording both what is actually said in answer to questions but also in casual conversation and formal discussions. The qualitative case study research includes multiple

sources of data, therefore language barriers will have direct influences on the overall credibility of the study. In the case of the researchers in these two studies, the fluency of the different languages (such as Arabic, Malay and Tamil) makes it easy to complete fieldwork without too many obstacles.

Difficulties were faced however, when it came to transcribing the interviews and observation notes from these various languages into English. This was a difficult and time consuming practice that would not be experienced by a researcher working in their own country using one main language. In these cases every effort was made to ensure translation into English was accurate and precise. This was done to ensure validity of the research, which is a crucial issue at the PhD research level. A major issue during the translation and transcription processes was concern about losing the original meaning from the participant's perspective. This kind of obstacle is very unusual in the Western societies, particularly from the English speaking countries like Australia, New Zealand, UK, and USA, where the research is carried out by a native English speaker who is conversant with the culture and customs.

A further issue experienced during this study was that sensitivity issues could be different between Western society and the Africa and Asian context. For example, in Libya the approval letter from the company should be in the Arabic language and not in English. This is a cultural as well as a legal issue in Libya. In Malaysia as well, some of the companies also faced the same situation. Requesting that all formal business communication be conducted in the national language is a national protection policy to ensure that it is clearly understood what the African and Asian companies may be agreeing to. For example, in Libya all official documentation must be in the Arabic language (Libya State, 1986).

In this context, we encountered problems with the Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Wollongong, Australia. The committee did not understand this national policy issue and was not flexible enough to accept letters written in the foreign language (in our case Arabic and Malay). It is very hard to request the company to produce an English version approval letter, when they are being asked to go against national policy on this matter. This issue needs to be addressed by University of Wollongong when allowing overseas students to conduct research in such countries. It would appear easier for the Ethics Committee to gain a reliable translation of such letters from research students than asking companies to go against national policies. This is central challenge that the researchers faced with the protocol of the Human Ethics Committee at the University of Wollongong.

Other issues like using tape recorder to record interviews is also a sensitive issue in the Africa and Asian communities. It may be acceptable and a common circumstances in Western societies, where the interview can be recorded³. This appears to be more of a problem due to cultural differences between Africa/Asia and developed countries. The majority of the research participants voluntarily agreed to participate in our interview if their conversation were not recorded. This was due to some personal, political, and social views on certain aspects of the research question, that they were wary of being directly quoted on.

Finally the financial issues raised above need to be discussed in relation to carrying out qualitative case study based research. A qualitative case study based research design (using multi-methods) can be expensive as it usually involves some form of travel and the data takes longer to collect and collate than a quantitative survey. Therefore, these need to be taken into account by a student researcher and the university at which they are studying. This is especially true where one is studying data from another country and needs to discuss when evaluating the best research design.

6. In conclusion

³ We are not saying all interviews conducted in developed countries are tape recorded or that all interviewee in developed countries agree to tape recording, merely that it is a more common practice.

The main issues experienced in the two studies outlined above were: cultural issues affecting access, the multiple language issue, sensitivity issues and financial constraints. Although there are many valuable insights to be gained from conducting a thorough qualitative case study analysis of a particular situation, the issues previously identified may encourage a researcher to reconsider using this approach. Some of the issues may not have been experienced if a quantitative approach had been used. These include: using a tape recorder during interview session, travel expenses, direct observations in the organisations and document analysis.

The need for cultural and research method training and evaluation of issues before data collection in the field is evident in this situation. Universities could consider carrying out training relating to these aspects in order to help international PhD researchers carry out research whilst accounting for the above issues.

Based on the above discussion, there is a gap between expectations and challenges regarding research in Africa/Asia as opposed to Western societies. This is particularly true in English speaking countries. Much of the current literature on research methodology does not pay attention to the issues and challenges raised that face PhD research students who wish to study in one country and research in another such as Africa or Asia. Currently, most of the discussion regarding qualitative case study research in the literature focuses on research design and the relationship between researcher and participants, without addressing multicultural or multilingual issues. This is an area in which further research would be beneficial.

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